

Columbia's Insistent Problem: Protestant Ethics, World War I, and Contemporary Civilization

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Dimitri Leggas discusses Columbia's Insistent Problem: Protestant Ethics, World War I, and Contemporary Civilization: [video]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2BLyEosmBU&t=1s>

The present Contemporary Civilization course consists of an introduction to the Western canon of philosophy. Contrary to its name, "Contemporary Civilization," known colloquially as "CC," does not directly pertain to contemporary political dilemmas. Starting their philosophical undertaking in classical antiquity, CC students end their inquiry in the twentieth century. The course, full of omissions and compromises, spends most of its yearlong duration on texts written before King's College royal charter of 1754. While the present iteration of this unifying course lacks a clear connection to contemporary issues, the inaugural sections of CC, which began in September of 1919, examined primarily what the course termed "insistent problems of the present."^[1] Columbia intended its novel course to prepare its students for participation in the contemporary American political economy.

A product of the end of World War I, the Core Curriculum's first course derived from a class called "War Issues," which educated future U.S. Army officers on the economic and political underpinnings of the Great War. To fully understand CC's development, however, requires a more complete discussion of Columbia's presence in Morningside Heights. In the late nineteenth century, the Heights became an increasingly Episcopal neighborhood. The turn of the century brought Jewish immigrants who challenged the neighborhood's religious and ethnic uniformity. When America entered the war, President Wilson called for patriotism, and some responded with radicalism. These dynamics produced a milieu of revitalized anti-Semitism and uncertainty about the future of empire. Columbia's administration, fearful of threats to the homogeneity of their white Anglo-Saxon Protestant school as it faced the challenges of post-war life, devised a curriculum that instilled pride in agricultural and industrial prowess laden with a clear sense of Western and Christian superiority. To instill these values, CC employed a systematic examination of environment, individuals, and society. The curriculum included a thorough account of Western European political and economic history. CC asked its students to consider their contemporary dilemmas with respect to the entire arc of western civilization.

Upon reading the syllabus—or rather the 100-page topic list—Professor John Dewey, on sabbatical in China when CC began for the first time wrote, "The course will be of great practical value to me. Books are scarce and hard to get hold of and that syllabus will take the place of quite a library."^[2] That the syllabus could substitute for a library meant that CC provided a sufficient basis for a student to address any contemporary problem. For Columbia's Protestant elite, those problems consisted of threats against the social and economic relations that maintained their superiority. Columbia's discomfort with radicalism, Judaism, and the diminishing importance of Protestantism in higher education determined the development of CC.

The Protestant Topography of Morningside Heights

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine transformed Morningside Heights into a neighborhood defined by Protestantism. Episcopalians first proposed the project in

1828, but lingering anti-British sentiments from the War of 1812 prevented New York from building an Anglican cathedral. The Panic of 1873 and the ensuing depression again halted the project. But in June of 1887, only a few months after becoming Bishop of New York, Henry Codman Potter successfully sought the approval of New York's citizens for the construction of a Protestant Cathedral. Gaining community support, the cathedral settled on its Morningside Heights location by that fall and laid the cornerstone in a ceremony on December 27, 1892, St. John's Day. Although the public perceived Potter's comments as not only ecumenical but also an indication that the cathedral would operate nondenominationally, the bishop fully intended to establish a cathedral for Episcopalians only.[3] This exclusivity set the tone for the neighborhood's further development. Because of its relationship with the cathedral's board, St. Luke's Hospital, another Episcopal institution, constructed a Morningside Heights location on W 113th street, where all its patients transferred by 1896.[4] The spiritual and bodily health of Morningside Heights had fallen under the purview of the Episcopal Church.

Columbia College confronted space issues at its 49th street campus around the time that St. John the Divine purchased its Morningside Heights property. Residential projects prevented the college from expanding across Madison Avenue, so Columbia managed with cramped facilities that deterred applicants.[5] The elite New York families that had typically sent their sons to Columbia began opting for their sons to study at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. While the former "Sons of Knickerbocker" attended other schools, Columbia moved toward irrelevance in higher education.[6] At the suggestion of President Seth Low and Trustee John Pine, Columbia purchased property from New York Hospital's Bloomingdale Asylum in 1892. This site became Columbia's current Morningside Heights campus. Though not a completely Episcopal school, Columbia College's charter of 1754 required that school's president belong to the Church of England.[7] When classes started in Morningside on October 4, 1897,[8] the Heights claimed an Episcopal church, hospital, and college. The space had been designed exclusively for elite Protestants.

As Columbia stretched across its new campus, it played with the idea of religious inclusivity. In 1900, William Earl Dodge, the patriarch of one of New York's wealthiest

mercantilist and industrialist families, donated \$100,000 for the construction of a building for the promotion of students' religious and spiritual activities.[9] Not wanting this religious center, later called Earl Hall, defined by a specific dogmatic or denominational teachings, he mandated in a letter to the trustees that it "promote organizations of Roman Catholics or of Hebrew Students." [10] Ecumenical and a liberal Christian, President Low welcomed Dodge's vision. Under Low's leadership, the trustees resolved that the tablet placed above the front door read:

Erected for the Students of this University

To the end

That Religion May Go Hand in Hand with Learning

And Character Grow with Knowledge[11]

However, Nicholas Murray Butler, who assumed the Columbia presidency in 1902, cringed at the prospect of opening campus spaces to non-Protestant students, Jews in particular. Only a few months after the dedication of Earl Hall, Pine wrote to Butler about his concerns on the so-called "Hebrew problem," or the influx of Jewish students at Columbia caused in part by the departure of the Sons of Knickerbocker. He said, "It is no longer a question whether Columbia shall be an Episcopalian or a Presbyterian university...but it is becoming a question whether Columbia shall be in the future a Christian or a Hebrew institution. [...] You know as well as I that we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the number of Jewish students." [12] Butler and Pine acquiesced to a nondenominational religious center, but they redirected their prejudices in terms of interreligious antagonisms. The vitriol expressed toward Jewish students at Columbia defined its campus's development over the next decade.

While Low had opposed the construction of residence halls, hoping to build a university integrated into the city, Butler aspired to an American-style boarding institution.

Residence halls posed a solution to the increased presence of Jews on campus, for instituting a boarding policy would drive the cost of attending Columbia up to a mark that only elite families could afford.[13] In short, Butler hoped to deter Jewish and

international students from enrolling, and further designating Morningside Heights as an exclusively Protestant community could achieve this end. The trustees' receiving a donation in 1903 for the construction of an Episcopal chapel on campus fell in line with Butler and Pine's vision for the college. Pine wrote that he hoped "St. Paul's Chapel may begin to turn the tide of college men, who for the past twenty or thirty years have been drifting away from the church." [14] St. Paul, the early Christian teacher, was an appropriate namesake given the trustees' wish to inculcate a changing student body with Christian values. Architecturally speaking, the chapel united Columbia with Protestantism, for "the siting, general ground plan, cornice line, and exterior materials were to follow the requirements for all university buildings, while the plan of the building, with its chancel, choir, and nave, was to meet the specific liturgical needs of an Episcopal chapel." [15] The interior architectural details, with its vaulted dome, the first of its kind built in an American chapel, metonymized the building's proselytizing function, for "the symbols of the four Evangelists in terra cotta [were] placed in powerful designs at the crowning of the four arches and united them with the great ring of the dome." [16] With its architectural novelty and Christian aggrandizement, St. Paul's Chapel repealed the tolerance enacted by Earl Hall.

The intentions behind the systematic Christianization of Columbia's campus prefigure the curricular changes that occurred shortly afterward. The aversion to non-Protestant individuals implied their potential presence in a previously exclusively Protestant space. The incremented degree of religiosity reflected in Morningside Heights's materiality demonstrated threats to the well-established Protestant control of Columbia. The continuous development of Morningside Heights in response to these threats necessitated, in the minds of Columbia's Episcopal leadership, the Western- and Euro-centric ideologies set forth by CC. Both the curriculum and campus evolved alongside the president and trustees' growing fears of a more diverse student body and their attempts to uphold Protestant Christian preeminence. In 1906, President Butler, verbalizing a conviction that had long manifested itself in Columbia's minds and campus buildings, declared, "Columbia University is a Christian Institution." [17]

Columbia at War

Another duty called upon Columbia when the United States entered World War I in January 1917: The preparation of its young men for combat and military operation. The Columbia Training Corps, established to train students for the fulfillment of this end, operated with considerable autonomy and molded campus culture to the needs of the American military. The demands placed on students by the Corps altered their physical presentation and academic preparation. For example, the University banned wearing civilian clothes in class for all individuals participating in Corps training.[18] Violating these prescriptions entailed punitive measures, for professors could refuse entrance to and mark absent any member of the Training Corps not appearing in class with their uniform.[19] As American involvement in the Great War continued, participation in regimented physical exercise programs became a requirement for graduation. In 1918, the U.S. government established Columbia's ROTC.[20] The social changes imposed by the Corps reflected not a feigned interest in the war, but an official acceptance of President Woodrow Wilson's call to arms.

President Butler took his patriotic role seriously and launched an investigative program to detect faculty members teaching doctrines "which [were] subversive of, or tend to the violation or disregard of, the Constitution or the laws of the United states...or which [tended] to encourage a spirit of disloyalty to the government of the United States." [21] A committee of five deans and four faculty members undertook this task of ferreting out unpatriotic faculty. Butler, taking additional measures to prevent anti-war sentiments, suspended academic freedom in June of 1917, when in a speech he said, "This is the University's last and only warning to any among us, if such there be, who are not with whole heart and mind and strength committed to fight with us to make the world safe for democracy." [22]

Before the administration could punish a faculty member for disparaging the Wilsonian justification for war, an undergraduate student made the first transgression five days after the speech. Leon Samson, a vocal figure in socialist and anarchist organizations, called not for a simple draft riot, but for a "draft revolution" when talking at a rally on

June 11, 1917. *The New York Times* quoted him, “We are going to refuse to stand up and shoot down our brothers. We have no love for Kaiser; but as much as we hate the German Kaiser, we hate still more the American Kaiser.” Samson then noticed a group of United States Marshals holding conference in the midst of his fellow socialists, and before he could dismiss the meeting, the Marshals arrested 30 men for not carrying registration cards.[23] Though he did not explicitly name President Wilson, Samson’s “American Kaiser” comment resulted in his receiving a refusal of readmission to Columbia from the trustees. An interview snippet in the *Columbia Specator* revealed that the University did not grant Samson a hearing, an opportunity to explain that he made his socialist comments off-campus and on his own time. Other radical students passed around handbills that prompted, “What about academic freedom for Students? [bolded in article] Why was Leon Samson expelled from Columbia?” Samson and many of the students who openly sided with him were Jewish,[24] and these resisters offered proof enough to Butler that Judaism equaled radicalism. In general, strong pro-war stances encouraged anti-Semitism that already existed on campus.

John Pine, inscribing his patriotism with his religious values, moralized the issue and felt completely justified in dismissing Samson. He argued that without the right to remove students, “the administration of the University becomes an impossibility so far as the preservation of either intellectual or moral standards is concerned.” For Pine, trustees held the ultimate power and responsibility for upholding tradition and safeguarding the University from any potential moral subversion. His expulsion of Samson only made sense within his patriotic and religious logic, which dictated, “Nothing can keep a university on an even keel except a carefully developed body of opinion that operates with substantial unity in time of need.”[25] The governing ideologies of CC would later reflect Pine’s strict adherence to his Protestant, patriotic framework. But in the immediate context, Samson felt wronged by the trustees’ “moral” steadfastness and sued Columbia for wrongful dismissal.[26]

The day the trial ended, Pine wrote to Butler again to inform him that a complete defense was made on behalf of the university, with exception of the fact that the University did not afford Samson a hearing. He felt that Columbia’s brief would eliminate

the need for this defense because “no hearing was necessary in this case as the offense was committed publicly, and the facts have been proven beyond all controversy.”[27] Fearing the public embarrassment that would follow if the court reinstated Samson on the grounds he did not have a hearing, Butler asked Harlan Stone, then Dean of Columbia Law School and future Chief Justice of the United States, to write the brief. Dean Stone cited *Goldstein vs. New York University*,[28] in which the plaintiff sued NYU for expelling him after he sent an unsolicited promiscuous letter to a woman on campus. In his decision, Judge Robert Patterson said that although the plaintiff became a student by the defendant’s invitation, “there is implied in such contract a term or condition that the student will not be guilty of misconduct as would be subversive of the discipline of the college or school, or as would show him to be morally unfit to be continued as a member thereof.”[29]

The decision of the Samson case broadened the meaning of “morally unfit” as used by Patterson to refer to behavior that would interfere in any way with the University’s control over its students. Using his seat to suggest precepts of Wilson’s view of democracy, Judge Mullen found that schools had a duty to instill patriotism and a love of country and that Samson’s participation in socialist meetings undermined this responsibility. He said, “With the inevitably close contact in which that would place him with impressionable young men of his own age who might thus be inoculated by him with the poison of his disloyalty, [Samson] is likely to constitute a menace to the university.”[30] The court denied Samson’s motion and upheld the university’s right to dismiss him as “morally unfit.”[31] More than this, the court affirmed Butler and Pine’s self-conception as morally superior.

Faculty also participated in anti-war activities under the assumption that the academic freedom guaranteed by Columbia protected their views. These incidents, however, led to more accusations of moral impropriety. In October 1917, the trustees fired James McKeen Cattell for petitioning Congress not to send Columbia’s draftees overseas and Henry Dana for inciting students to resist conscription.[32] The suppression of faculty voices led some to criticize the university for failing to uphold the democratic values it purported to defend in its tireless support of the war. The day after Columbia announced

Cattell's dismissal, the *New York Herald* published an editorial cartoon that identified Columbia with the German Kaiser. It depicted Columbia's Alma Mater wearing a helmet reminiscent of the Prussian Pickelhaube while washing the academic robes of Cattell and Dana.[33] Members of the philosophy faculty, led by John Dewey, demanded that the University examine the grounds for dismissing a professor. In response, the trustees released a memorandum, which cited and discussed excerpts from the charter, and pushed back against the notion that tenure offered a professor blanket immunity, especially under the tenuous moral conditions imposed by the war. It said, "The language of the charter and the construction placed upon it by the Supreme Court, leave no doubt as to the power of the trustees to effect removals whenever in their judgment the best interests of the University may require." [34] It mentioned neither Cattell nor Dana. The language used by this memo mimicked that of the *Samson* decision in that it determined the contractual relationship between trustees and faculty ceased to exist when the faculty member appeared moral unfit.

A letter from George Gilmore, a former professor of theology at Bangor Theological seminary, to John Pine illustrated the tensions with regard to academic freedom. Gilmore applauded the firing of Professors Cattell and Dana and argued that academic freedom did not permit a teacher to claim authority on matters not relating to the subjects of his expertise. He proffered his opinion on the matters before Pine, "The outcry raised by pro-Germans, pacifists, and other anti-Americans with reference to recent events in Columbia is therefore beside the mark. It has no basis of fact or principle either in Germany or America." [35] While those siding with Gilmore, Pine, and Butler applied the Wilsonian view of the World War to label anti-war activists as undemocratic, others, claiming to uphold academic freedom, found Wilson's actions, and the policies they incited at Columbia, themselves undemocratic. The pro-war and pacifist camps called each other by the same name. The warmongers needed an outlet for their hyper-inflated sense of patriotism fueled by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elitism and even anti-Semitism. The fired faculty simply wanted jobs.

The American Association of University Professors, founded in 1915 by Dewey, made efforts during World War I to protect the academic liberties of faculty. This task largely

consisted of ensuring that tenured professors kept their positions regardless of the contents of their writings, teachings, and speech. Indeed, the third practical proposal of the “1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure” vowed, “To render the profession more attractive to men of high ability and strong personality by insuring the dignity, the independence, and the reasonable security of tenure, of the professorial office.”[36] Prioritizing this responsibility rather than considering the ideas of the people they protected, the AAUP and their wartime movement for academic freedom in America represented not just pacifist and anti-war views but also other unsavory ones, including eugenics. For example, in 1914, Cattell had argued, “The most negative effect of the ‘mad and wanton European war’ would be to reduce the birthrate of all combatant countries.”[37] Although Columbia dismissed him for his anti-war letters, the protection offered to him by the AAUP excused these positive eugenicist claims. Dewey, who had only recently accepted the moral validity of the war and became a mediator between the patriotic administration and the dissenters,[38] faced the dilemma of distinguishing the academic freedom for which he advocated from its consequences.

The perilous nature of academic freedom during World War I highlights the persistence of white Protestant privilege at American institutions of higher education. Wilson’s rallying around democracy and Columbia’s patriotism justified and hardened the school’s anti-Semitism. Butler, extolling Columbia’s service to the country in the days following Armistice, would write, “No University in the world excels [Columbia] in democratic spirit or in liberal policy. While its standard of admission and of graduation are uniformly severe, its programs of study are flexible, practical, and adjusted to present-day.”[39] In juxtaposing the elite environment at Columbia with the University’s quick adjustment to patriotic service, he created a false dichotomy. Columbia’s elite essence ensured its subservience to (Kaiser) Wilson’s demands because the universality of democracy did not yet extend beyond the WASPs who strained to remain atop their perch. Upton Sinclair, railing against Butler in his 1923 report on American higher education, called the president a hypocrite for being a “vehement Hun-hunter” and denouncer “of American socialists on the basis of their supposed pro-Germanism” after having mingled with Kaiser Wilhelm in 1907. Sinclair said, “President Butler was

spending the summer in Germany—arranging for that ‘epileptic degenerate’ to send a ‘Kaiser professor’ to Columbia University to heighten his prestige with the American people.”[40] Columbia as represented by President Butler cared for democracy only as much as it ensured the maintenance of its uniform Protestant ethic. The following sections demonstrate that CC helped to standardize knowledge on campus.

War Issues

The war presented an *issue* to Columbia’s anti-Semites in that the training and sending off of American men to fight in Europe exacerbated Columbia’s loss of the Sons of Knickerbocker and resulted in the rapid increase in the number of international students, who were largely Jewish. President Butler called the incoming freshman class of 1917 “depressing in the extreme” because “it is largely made up of foreign born and children of those but recently arrived in this country.”[41] The Jewish cohort of that class accounted for 40 percent of its members. The lyrics to a popular song among students at elite American colleges immortalized this fact:

Oh. Harvard’s run by millionaires,

And Yale is run by booze,

Cornell is run by farmers’ sons,

Columbia’s run by Jews,

So give a cheer for Baxter Street,

Another one for Pell,

And when the little sheenies die,

Their souls will go to hell.[42]

Fearing the institution’s reputation would degrade, Butler needed to reduce Jewish enrollment, but to subdue public outcry, he heeded the advice offered to him by John Pine in the 1902 letter on the “Hebrew problem”: “We have neither the legal nor the

moral right to exclude them or to discriminate against them, but we can assert and emphasize the character of the University as a Christian institution. [...] We cannot keep the Jews out, but we can bring Christianity in.”[43] This statement attested to Butler and Pine’s understanding of their hypocritical moral outlooks. Notwithstanding his self-awareness, Butler decided, “In order to fortify and hold the position that the University should itself, by an affirmative process and not merely by a negative process of exclusion, choose those upon which it wished to expend its funds and energies.”[44] In *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admission in America*, an account of discrimination against Jewish students in higher education, Harold Wechsler explains Butler’s logic, “Columbia wanted to fill its now limited number of seats with ‘desirables’—not simply rid itself of ‘undesirables.’ Eliminating Jewish constituency implied considerable loss of income from tuition unless students took their place.”[45] Columbia knew what types of student it desired, and Columbia College Dean Herbert Hawkes described him as “the boy who looks at his College career in the way we like to believe we did ourselves some years ago. [...] Though he usually has a definite ambition he is able and willing to work toward it in a manner somewhat in accord with the traditions of the American College.” The University wanted to preserve the ubiquity of the white Protestant participant in American capitalism at their institution.

Columbia’s administration gave thorough consideration to Butler’s vision of a residential Columbia as a means to obtain its optimal student body. Dean Hawkes wrote a memorandum outlining the possibility of dividing Columbia into two separate schools: a “residential college” for Columbia’s traditional students and a “university college” for the professionally minded and less affluent students. Hawkes called this suggestion “an attempt to fulfill the obligation of the University toward the community in which we are placed without endangering the solidarity and homogeneity [sic] of the group that must [...] observe dispassionately the events of the present in order to meet the tremendous problems of the future.”[46] The image painted by Hawkes somewhat resembled the Columbia at the end of the war when CC emerged. For at that time, the student ranks, made homogenous again by the returning WASPs, studied the trajectory of western civilization with the aim of understanding contemporary dilemmas of post-war America. However, as long as the war continued, it postponed the full resolution of the “Hebrew

problem”—though Columbia would never get the resolution it wanted. For the time, the University prioritized its patriotic duty to prepare men to preserve democracy at whatever cost to democracy.

In order to fulfill its role as a patriotic American institution, Columbia maintained a chapter of the Students' Army Training Corps, which trained future officers. While admitted students could select different sequences of study, namely Infantry, Artillery, and Machine Gunnery; Navy; Medicine; and Engineering, among other specialized fields, everyone participated in a course dubbed “War Issues.”[47] War Issues covered the political makeup and economic capacities of the nations of contemporary Europe to provide the context of the war. More significantly, it aimed to explain America's rationale for joining the war. Professor Frederick J. E. Woodbridge of Columbia chaired the SATC's board, which wrote the textbook for the course. The War Issues curriculum laid the groundwork for CC's curriculum.

Because the War Issues textbook defended America's involvement in WWI, which was President Wilson's decision, it made extensive use of his speeches and ideas. The course in War Issues offered future officers the opportunity to understand in detail their Commander in Chief's approach to foreign policy. The text consists of eight installments and opens with a quick overview of the balance of powers in Europe in 1914. The first two installments quickly fault Germany for starting the war and juxtapose their “hostility” to America's neutrality in the affair. Calling German soldiers ruthless and expressing consternation at the conflict set the stage for the text's central claim, that the United States joined the war in order to establish peace. Quoting Woodrow Wilson, it says, “Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments, backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people.”[48] Using the same moralized premises that ensured the University's loyalty during the war, the course in War Issues instructed future Army officers that they would serve in order to establish global peace. The SATC and its coursework advanced the imperialist and global-capitalist Wilsonian

doctrines of intervention—dropping from isolationist stance—under the guise of protecting democracy.

The third, fourth, and fifth installments form a trilogy on the political and economic divisions of Europe. The third considers the different states and the balance of power amongst them, the fourth the agricultural and industrial capabilities of European nations, and the fifth the distribution of resources in comparison to political power. Finding ubiquitous nationalistic aspirations coupled with unequal development and resources, the text concludes that war naturally arose from these unstable conditions.[49] This portion of the content exerted the greatest influence on CC, which also searched for explanations for contemporary events in political economy. War Issues and CC sections discussed the industrial and agricultural revolutions in the context of nationalism and imperialism.

The following installment reiterates the claim that America acted as a global peacekeeping force by joining the war. It establishes this point by giving an overview of politics of non-European nations and considering their relationship with Europe. Describing a state of affairs in which Asia, Africa, and Oceania were politically subject to Europe, the course claimed that two perspectives existed on this reality. The “old view” dictated that subjected people existed for the sake of the European rulers while the “new view” that government always exists for the governed, even outside of Europe. War Issues claimed American superiority on the matter: “Great Britain and France [...] promoted the new view. The United States sustained it in theory and practice. Russia ignored it [...] Germany contemptuously rejected it, and asserted her right, by virtue of a divine mission, to impose her political sway upon non-European and European alike.”[50] After giving a detailed account of the political and economic conditions of the contemporary world, War Issues drew the conclusion that America not only upheld anti-imperialist values but also suffered due the imperialist grasp of Germany. Fighting against anti-democratic Germany served as justification for America’s entrance to the war. War Issues set the stage for CC to use specific accounts of political and economic history as a basis for establishing American exceptionalism.

War Solutions

When armistice came, War Issues ceased to matter. But it left Columbia with a new approach to Butler's plan to exclude Jews through the affirmation of others: "objective" psychological or intelligence evaluations. Though it had previously considered using such an examination as a criterion for entrance, Columbia did not implement this procedure until the SATC came to campus. The United States War department had left the training of the majority of its officers to universities through the SATC. Overwhelmed with applicants meeting the baseline standards, the University used the Thorndike Tests for Mental Alertness, devised by Teachers College's Edward Thorndike with the objective of measuring innate potential, as opposed to the ability to memorize content, to select its members.[51] Though the war ended and the SATC became defunct, a modified Thorndike-style test remained part of the admissions process to Columbia College. These exams, which suffered from "cultural biases that significantly disadvantaged test takers unfamiliar with American culture or American life beyond the boroughs,"[52] screened out foreign and Jewish applicants to Columbia. More exclusive measures supplemented the supposedly objective affirmation of Columbia's archetypal student. These included the requirements that applicants state their family religion along with a photograph and take a personal interview with Dean Hawkes and his assistants, none of whom was Jewish.[53] The use of racist examinations and applications allowed Columbia to diminish the presence of Jews and other minorities on campus.

Not everyone bought into the objectivity of the Thorndike examination, and Dean Hawkes soon found himself offering distorted rationales for its use. These justifications indicate his sharing the desire exhibited by Butler and his trustees to preserve the elite Protestant version of Columbia. He informed Columbia's alumni, composed at this point mainly of the so-called "desirables," that Columbia had "learned that a system of admission based not only on school record and the usual entrance examinations, but also on a purely objective use of the Thorndike psychological tests afford a student body that is reasonably well balanced." While this statement in itself might have left the reader unaware of the significance of race and ethnicity in these examination, Hawkes, defending—thus revealing—the University's true intentions, added, "No one group,

whether Italians, Jews, Chinese, or English shows qualities of mind that suggest the admission of so large a proportion of that group as to disturb the balance here mentioned.”[54] Hawkes’s defense failed to mention that the popularity of the concept of intelligence and intelligence tests coincided with the eugenics movement, which held that people of Northern and Western Europe had higher intelligence.[55] Columbia sculpted its ideal student body with the tools—namely the academic vindication of racist and anti-Semitic metrics and modes of valuation—developed in response to the challenges to and preservation of white Protestant superiority during World War I.

Contemporary Civilization

The end of World War I did not dampen the crisis for Western empire, but possibly amplified it. With speculations of increasing social unrest, particularly in regard to radicalism (perceived also as Judaism), some professors felt the need for a course to continue the War Issues discussion of western political economy, but in the newfound context of momentary peace. This “Peace Issues” course would combine and replace the required first year courses History A and Philosophy A. In the spring of 1919, War Issues instructor Lieutenant Colonel John Coss, a professor of philosophy at Columbia, planned this course, which students first took that fall under the name “Introduction to Contemporary Civilization.”[56] His personal letters during the war reveal his faith in America’s moral purity and his adherence to the imperialist, interventionist, and Wilsonian perspectives of War Issues. He wrote to his mother in the spring of 1917, “I don’t do much these days but think of the War [...] There is a serious conviction that war is necessary, and an equally serious determination to face it.”[57] As a former War Issues teacher, an original drafter of the CC syllabus, and the course’s first director, Coss’s fetishizing of democracy as a feature of western, especially Protestant, civilization would shape the course.

Taking an axiomatic approach, CC attempted to find a basis for the contemporary political and economic situation in geography and psychology. According to an article written by Dean Hawkes, the principle sections were:

1. The physical world, which man has to live in and use.
2. The chief racial and cultural groups.
3. The chief human traits which must be considered if man is to know himself and direct his own activity.
4. The unique features of the life of the western world of today—intellectual, economic, political—displayed in contrast with the characteristic features of the civilization of earlier days.
5. The history during recent times of the countries now linked in close international relations.
6. The insistent problems these nations must face, internal and international. Among these problems are: How to produce many goods cheaply and at the same time humanely; how to determine the just division of industrial earnings; how to achieve a legal and political order which will be at once responsive to a changing social opinion and sufficiently stable to permit the completion of large cooperative enterprises, [...].^[58]

Discussing the course's pedagogy, Coss wrote, "In the first two weeks the physical features of the earth and the natural resources of the different countries are studied [...]. The types of human behavior are studied: instinct, habit, reflection. Then in survey form the more important human traits are presented, and in every instance an attempt is made to show the social result of these same traits."^[59] CC used Irwin Edman's *Human Traits and Their Social Significance* to explain to students these relationships between individual and social features. Claiming that capital accumulation promoted the development of social interactions, it says, "The progress of civilization beyond its earliest states is held, by some sociologists and economists, to be ascribed to the power of the acquisitive instinct."^[60] Edman, by denoting capital gains as a foundational aspect of social interaction, succumbs to the general criticism Sinclair gave in *The Goose-Step*, that "our education system is not a public service, but an instrument of special privilege; its purpose is not to further the welfare of mankind, but merely to keep America capitalist."^[61]

Having established humans as a capitalist “race,” Edwin’s book proceeds to establish the “continuous” trajectory of that race. *Human Traits* maintained the continuity of human development by ignoring all civilizations except the sequence: the Greeks, the Roman Empire, Renaissance Italians, and the English Empire. By linking the English-speaking world to that of the ancient Greeks, Edman makes claims about the high prestige of contemporary American society. These imply that American society was part of a historical tradition, one that he and his colleagues considered particularly favorable. Keeping with its theme of relating individual traits to civilizational features, the book argued that this tradition derived from the habits of all the individuals participating in it.[62] Of course, Edman’s discussion of a whitewashed human species could not lack a chapter devoted to the supposed differences imposed by sex and by race. Responding to Franz Boas’s opposition to scientific racism, it says, “The fact remains that there are, despite the lack of evidence for hereditary mental differences, practical differences in the mental activity of different races that are of social importance.”[63] CC itself served as a proof of this concept to its students, for under the presumption of the Thorndike examinations’ objectivity, only those favored by supposed practical differences would appear in the sections. The belief in these “practical differences,” in other words racism, became both assumptions and conclusions of Edman’s text.

If Edman’s *Human Traits* offers a general relation between individuals and their societies in order to make superior evaluations of western civilization, then John Storck’s *Man and Civilization* outlines the specific features that constitute the western society described by the course. He declares, “Our culture has been the scene of the most thoroughgoing and the most successful attempt ever made to interpret the whole order of nature in mechanic-causal terms.”[64] His using the term “our” acknowledges the fact that the developers of this course designed it for the inculcation of white Protestant elites according to the values of their tradition—the real elitist tradition at Columbia or the constructed civilizational tradition described by Edman and Van Amringe. It also reflects the same self-selection implied by Edman’s discussion of “practical differences.” According to Storck, these practical differences, accumulated in benefit of western civilization, led to the following features:

Mechanical invention. No other culture has ever made so extensive a use of machinery, or has so thoroughly harnessed to its uses the power resources of the globe.

The national state. Everywhere throughout the western world men live today in aggressive national states. [...] The psychological aspect of nationalism is the sentiment of patriotism. It is a natural, and a good thing.”

The historical attitude. The modern man attempts to explain almost everything by a reference to its past. [...] He consults the founding fathers when he cannot decide whether his country should join the League of Nations”

Man and Civilization commends these features and upholds democracy and individualism.[65]

For the discussion of political economy, the course’s main focus, the CC committee selected Carlton Hayes’s *Political and Social History of Modern Europe*, a two-volume text spanning over 1200 pages. Perhaps the choice of Hayes’s book reflected underlying institutional politics, for after the war, Hayes considered leaving Columbia. However, at Dean Hawkes’s testament to the fact that Hayes was a Columbia man whose presence was essential to the continuing welfare of the institution and assurance that “if recognition be given to Professor Hayes as he returns from his work in the Army, he will take up his duties at Columbia with a renewed vigor and devotion,”[66] Butler decided to take the requisite steps to keep Hayes at Columbia. This at least included a promotion to full professorship and an increase in salary,[67] but perhaps it also included the honor of penning a CC textbook and the accompanying royalty fees. If this was in fact the case, then Hayes represented the encapsulation of all the problems with CC. His importance to Columbia’s welfare, which in Dean Hawkes’s language referred to the preservation of its homogeneity and tradition, meant that a white professor wrote a history book for the instruction of white students in American values of democracy and wealth accumulation as understood in terms of the whole of western history.

Volume I traces an arc from the Protestant Reformation to the Enlightenment. Although Hayes converted to Catholicism in 1904, the book remains critical of Catholics and reflects deference to Protestant history. *Political and Social History* describes the

Protestant Reformation as a “successful revolt against the papal monarchy” in which the laypeople of Germany, Scandinavia, Scotland, and England overcame the political and financial abuses of the Catholic Church.[68] While Hayes traces the gradual unfurling of conditions of democracy to their zenith in the French Revolution, he did not extensively consider Jews, Muslims, or other non-Christian groups in Europe’s history who might not have enjoyed such universality. What serves as a conclusion to Volume I discusses the importance of the French Revolution’s “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.” Hayes conceived Liberty as the deposition of autocratic government and the ascendance of property rights, Equality the destruction of the feudal system and establishment of the right of life and pursuit of happiness, and Fraternity a brotherhood of men willing to do anything in defense of the nation’s interest. Considering that Hayes published these volumes in the same moment that bore CC, the end of World War I, the first two properties of democracy, as he explained them, indicate the importance of capitalism, while the last alludes to Woodrow Wilson’s call for the United States to defend itself by defending democracy.

Volume II of Hayes’s book draws more clearly and explicitly the conclusions made in Volume I. It concerned itself with explaining the relationship between the industrial revolution and nationalism and democracy. As he completed his sweep of Western Europe’s history, Hayes wrote, “The immediate aftermath of the World War seemed to confirm Woodrow Wilson’s contention that the war had been waged ‘to make the world safe for democracy.’ [...] All the Great Powers and most of the lesser ones adopted or elaborated democratic forms of government.”[69] Like War Issues, CC embraced the imperialist aspects of Wilsonian thought and justified them through a systematic account of Western Europe’s political, economic, and religious history. In line with the goal of applying the knowledge of the historical backdrop of western civilization to contemporary problems, the second half of the course concluded with a study of the constitution of the League of Nations,[70] still an open quandary in the fall of 1919.

These three books taken in tandem produce an explanation of western civilization according to a rationalistic method, which starts within the human mind and arrives at the whole of the globe. As one would expect, given that it unquestioningly approved of

capitalism and imperialism, CC operated upon an ideological basis rather than a material one. Echoing John Pine's idea that a university requires a solid set of unified opinions to operate successfully, Dean Hawkes said that CC ought to provide Columbia's students with a set of ideals to live by. These ideals, which he introduced when talking about Columbia's traditional student, who resembled those who came before, were the ideals of the WASP elite. In an address, appropriately given in front of St. Paul's Chapel, he said, "The only sound and substantial basis even for the most practical and material of callings is a worthy idea. An idea is a thing of the mind, out of the flesh." [71] Fearing social unrest at the end of war, and associating radicalism with Judaism, he felt the university had the responsibility to prepare students to meet "opponents of decency and sound government." [72] Meaning, afraid of opposition to its Protestant elitism in the aftermath of World War I, Columbia built a course to help its students maintain a traditionally Western European and Christian space as such. The student body well understood the course's relation to the war, as an article in the *Columbia Spectator* said, "The course in Contemporary Civilization is the result of a frank attempt by Dean Herbert E. Hawkes and his associates to work out a new scheme of history study as a consequence of the lessons taught by the war." [73] These lessons constituted the aforementioned threats for which Columbia prepared its Sons of Knickerbocker to face.

Students responded positively to the new course and its application of deductive procedures to political and economic history. Director Coss, however, gave credit for its success not to the faculty but to the students in the freshman class, whom he felt the war and social unrest thereafter made "thoughtful." These freshmen performed at such a high level, he said, because the new admission examinations "made possible the formation of classes on a basis of intellectual uniformity." [74] CC found this desired uniformity in the homogeneity of the class, which instructed its students in all matters relating to homogeneity. Again, this uniformity came at the expense of exclusion of non-WASP students, who Dean Hawkes referred to when he wrote, "I do not believe that a College would do well to admit too many men of low mentality who have ambition but not brains." [75]

The exclusion of Jews through the admissions examinations became more directly connected to CC when Ben Wood, one of the early proponents of CC and later its technical director, experimented with a “new type of objective examination” in the CC sections of 1921. He published a report on this experiment, which he expanded into an extensive study of the use of the Thorndike Intelligence Test as a partial criterion for admission to Columbia College. His discussion of this study, *Measurement in Higher Education*, indicated a positive correlation between scores on the Thorndike examinations and success in college. This became the basis on which Columbia opted for the continuation of the examinations as a criterion for entrance. Dean Hawkes alerted Butler to Wood’s increasing importance and thus momentarily cemented the examinations place at Columbia.[76]

Wood began his report by lamenting the current state of grading in America and citing massive variability between grades assigned to the same examination by different teachers. He proposed that educators require a more transparent and objective means of assessing students’ capabilities because grades should indicate to students their performance (the pedagogical function of grades) and order students according to their abilities (the administrative function of grades). Contemporary Civilization provided an ideal testing ground for the new metrics of intelligence because the uniformity of content across sections resulted in a large sample size.[77] To demonstrate the absolute *subjectivity* of the questions, one of each type used by Wood follows:

True-False

Irrigation is carried on more extensively on the eastern than on the western slopes of the mountains of California.

Completion

The uneven distribution of natural resources makes South America largely dependent for its.....on the United States.”

Recognition

The Commercial Revolution by the 18th C. had established the commercial supremacy of—Spain, Venice, Portugal, England, Germany, Holland.[78]

The exam, producing an average score was 125 out of 250,[79] proved difficult for the CC students. But rescaling the grades, Wood found that the “New Examination” correlated highly with other markers of success more consistently and accurately ordered the abilities of the test takers. According to him, “This experiment conclusively demonstrated the superiority of the New Examination method over the traditional method of *measuring* school products.”[80] CC section instructors R. G. Tugwell, A. Gordon Dewey, John Coss all confirmed the statistical rigor and broad objective coverage offered by the New Examination in anecdotes detailed at the end of the report. Given their knowledge of the course material, they certainly understood the complete lack of objectivity of the content on the New Examination. This test, designed to examine and quantify innate abilities, amounted instead to an extended trivia quiz. Wood submitted *Measurement in Higher Education* as a thesis, for which he earned a doctorate in philosophy. The University awarded Wood for his experiments in a privileged space that statistically justified the administration of an examination for the maintenance of that privileged space. CC, with Wood’s help, sustained itself amongst Columbia’s Protestant elite.

The CC sections also intersected with another of Columbia’s initial exclusionary measures, the establishment of the University as a residential school. On November 3, 1919, administrators asked students in Contemporary Civilization whether they would have entered the school in the fall if residence were mandatory by a rule. Of the respondents, 235 said “yes” or “probably yes;” 184 said “no” or “probably no.” Of the “no” variety, 110 students explained their response primarily with financial reasons. Many of these were probably Jewish or international students. “Of the men who voted ‘yes,’ 110 [were] not in residence in the dormitories and consequently would constitute the type of student who would be gained as residential students in case pressure were brought to bear upon the students registered in Columbia College.”[81] These students, who could have afforded to attend Columbia even if required to live on campus, would preserve the homogeneity of the institution.

The Thorndike examinations and the potential to implement a strictly residential policy attempted to preserve the majority of white students on campus. This impulse led to the Student Board's taking a vote on the residential college proposal. Dean Hawkes reported to President Butler that "most of the Board felt that the College would be of greater service in selecting a homogenous group and confining its efforts to their education even though such a course might result in the elimination of a considerable number of boys who at present are able to come to Columbia."^[82] Butler did not exactly achieve his vision of a residential college. His notes contain blueprints from that time that show a potential Columbia Campus with nine undergraduate residence halls.^[83] The development of Morningside Heights as a Protestant neighborhood happened in a short span, but the plan accelerated and now threatened to modify the space within only a few blocks in a more quiet and sinister way. The increased cost of attendance in the residential plan forwarded by Hawkes equaled around \$700 in 1919,^[84] or over \$10,000 today! Despite Hawkes's preference for the world of ideas over the material world, the exclusionary ideas behind increase in cost came at a massive financial cost.

The fact that Dean Hawkes so strongly favored the "idea" over the "flesh" is ironic considering the full context in which CC appeared. While Hawkes considered CC ideologically pure and descendent from a long succession of Western ideas, in reality the course emerged from its physical surroundings and cultural moment. From the material conditions, or the "flesh," of Columbia. The succession of Christianizing events in Morningside Heights made the idea of including Jewish students all the more terrifying to President Butler and Columbia's trustees. The end of World War I only heightened fears about radical Jews, and the prospect of the decline of American empire compelled Columbia to continue its wartime curriculum in a time of peace. Instilling Wilsonian doctrine in its participants, CC represented an attempt to maintain Columbia as a bastion of whiteness and Christianity. This phenomenon made sense in the teens, a turning point at which twentieth century criticism of higher education led to more secular curricula. In 1910, for example, white middle-class Protestants still attended the University at a much higher rate than any other group but within a decade began experiencing the diversification and secularization of what were formerly *their* schools.^[85] A more diverse Columbia could not maintain such a pedagogical approach

for long, as an increasingly inclusive student body did not permit a course with social and cultural value judgments as explicit as those found in the original CC. In order to preserve the course's founding principle, Western hegemony, in following decades Columbia excised historical and contemporary discussions altogether and shifted focus toward a canon defined by specific texts. That is, the same conditions that presupposed CC brought on its metamorphosis. The present model, though perhaps more outwardly benign, retains the same ugly form.

The gradual decline of Protestantism at Columbia and other American institutions led to doubts about the place of CC at Columbia. Dean Hawkes, a frequent verbal supporter of homogeneity at Columbia, also recorded an early call for the creation of equivalent courses covering non-western society. He wrote to President Butler, "An inspection of the syllabus of this course makes it clear that the title is far more inclusive than the subject matter of the course would warrant. The civilizations discussed are almost exclusively those Western civilizations with which the United States is most intimately concerned."^[86] His letter started the conversation of whether Columbia should offer survey courses on the civilizations of India, China, and Japan. Despite this singular record of Hawkes's advocating for inclusion, he remained a faithful WASP to Butler's Columbia throughout the first decade of CC. In his 1902 letter on the Hebrew problem, trustee Pine argued that the bible should be taught in the University and that "it should be held in such surroundings and in such a manner as to impress all students of all creeds with its meaning and importance."^[87] While CC continued to fend off non-WASP pushback, Butler took Pine's advice and sought to expand religious offerings to include biblical studies, religious philosophy, and religious education.^[88] Further inquiring into the presence of religious studies on campus, in 1924, Butler asked Hawkes to report on the number of men at Columbia pursuing careers in the ministry. Dean Hawkes found that "there were not over a half-dozen men in Columbia College who were looking forward to this profession six or seven years ago and there was probably as small a number as this ever since 1910."^[89] The development of CC to prevent the collapse of the University's Protestant base led to the student body's diminished involvement with explicitly religious activities. The secularization of American colleges partially explains

this phenomenon, but another answer lies in the further development of Morningside Heights as a Protestant space.

In 1905, the Union Theological Seminary bought property—its current property bounded between Broadway and Claremont and between 120th and 122nd streets—on the northwest Morningside Plateau, its current property bounded between Broadway and Claremont and between 120th and 122nd streets.[90] Like the foundation of Earl Hall, Union rejected the formerly strict sectarian nature of the neighborhood. The donation for the purchase of the property made by seminary board member D. Willis James coincided with the seminary's movement toward ecclesiastical liberalism, for its board unanimously voted on November 14, 1904, to convert the Presbyterian school to a nondenominational center for Protestant denominations. The widow of William Earl Dodge, the benefactor of Earl Hall, gave \$120,000 for the endowment of a professorship at this newly nonsectarian institution.[91] When classes at Union's Morningside campus started in the fall of 1910, Columbia lost yet more men who intended to join the ministry.

Despite Columbia's waning importance as a center of Episcopalian and Protestant Christianity—even in the evermore Protestant Morningside Heights—the University did not halt its discrimination toward Jews over the following decade. Defending the proportion of Jewish students admitted with the Thorndike examination as an admissions criterion, Hawkes wrote, "I believe that we ought to carry at least 15% of Jews and I do not think that 20% is excessive for Columbia. [...] It is true that during the administration of our mental test, the percentage of Jews has been cut down but is this not due at all to the fact that they are Jews." He argued, as before, that the exams preserved a balance of students and would limit the acceptance of too many of any type of student, even the French student. Acknowledging his effort to maintain the school's homogeneity, however, the Dean added, "When a man is responsible for the development of an institution involving as it does traditions and a heritage which may have required decades to develop [sic], it is certain that he bears a very heavy responsibility to his institution and to the community. He has no right to take steps that will destroy the value of the institution." Preserving Columbia's value included taking

steps that would limit the number of “Jews, colored people, and other groups which are more or less distinctive.”[92] Columbia eventually quit its policy of exclusion of Jews through indirect means in favor of more severe measures. Harold Wechsler, who wrote about Jewish students at elite American schools, says, “Sometime in the late 20’s or early 30’s, Columbia College set a limit to the number of Jewish and Catholic applicants it would admit.”[93]

The introduction of a limit represented the failure of CC to adequately preserve the ideological firmament of elite Protestant Columbia. Twenty-nine years after the donation of the money for Earl Hall, a building around which religious debate centered, Columbia still could not manage to keep Jewish students out of a predominately Protestant space. Coss, in a 1929 report on the use of Earl Hall, wrote to Dean Hawkes, “I still feel very anxious to have it distinctly understood that the building is absolutely free to all the students without reference to creed or nationality.”[94] In case he had not made his sentiment clear, the first CC director “The picture of the use of the Chapel by Jews and Catholics I think so grotesque that it cannot meet with favor. [...] It would certainly lend itself to burlesque in a way which would not help the main cause.”[95] Hawkes agreed with Coss and even rejected the idea of designating a small room for synagogue meetings. A decade after the first attempt to bar Jews from entering, Columbia took a far more explicit approach.

This renewed effort to limit Jewish students coincided with the encroachment of Judaism on the formerly Protestant-only Morningside Heights. In 1929-30 the Jewish Theological Seminary of America built on Broadway between West 122nd and 123rd streets. According to Dolkart, “The seminary traces its history to the establishment in 1886 of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association, founded to train American Jews in rabbinical studies while recognizing the necessity of adapting these traditional practices to modern American life.”[96] This institution of higher education, like Columbia with its implementation of CC, developed a course imbued with religious significance on the problems of the present. That is, these two programs applied the same pedagogical model. While the Jewish Theological Seminary of America affirmed

its members' culture in the context of a new environment, Columbia rejected the cultures of others when they threatened established norms.

President Butler revealed an insight into his feelings about Columbia University at the unveiling of the tablet at St. Paul's Chapel in memory of General William Barclay Parsons, a former trustee. In his address, he said:

During the past two generations Columbia has been chiefly guided and its policies maintained by two groups of men. The older group which protected it during the Civil War and the years which immediately followed, who by their courage and foresight prevented the alienation of its estates. [...] Then the men who sat about the table as the University was under construction had new problems to solve, new difficulties to overcome, new counsels to give to the President and his associates in the administrative conduct of the University's life. They were the group to which General Parsons belongs. The names of his fellows are already carved upon this wall. They were Rives and Pine and Bangs and now Parsons. These four men, as working Trustees, as Chairmen of Committees, never for a moment weakened in their faith or relaxed their interest, but day-by-day did the patient work which was wholly essential if Columbia University was to be.[97]

Butler interpolated himself and his trustees in a line of men who acted in order to preserve the University's traditions. While the group of trustees during the Civil War, who preserved Columbia's estate, undoubtedly protected property and wealth accumulated through the exploitation of enslaved Africans, the men who assisted Butler assisted in the preservation of Columbia as a white Protestant space. Keeping with Dean Hawkes's high estimation of the "worthy idea," Butler and his trustees acted every day to prevent the alienation of their Protestant, capitalist, and imperialist spirit by denying the material benefits of Columbia University to non-white and non-Protestant students. Because they were WASPs they denied privileges to Jews and because they denied privileges to Jews they were WASPs. Euro-American hegemony appeared as the central premise and conclusion of Contemporary Civilization, a course that acted as an expression of these exclusionary acts.

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[97] NMB, "Remarks at the Unveiling of the Tablet at Saint Paul's Chapel," October 1, 1934, Box 486, NMB files, CF, CUA, CUL.